



13281 USPTO
010504

LASER SCANNING UNIT

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

5 The present invention relates to a laser scanning unit, and more particularly to a laser scanning unit that includes a micro electronic mechanic system (MEMS) oscillatory mirror disposed between a collimator and an $f\theta$ lens. The MEMS oscillatory mirror oscillates in
10 harmonic motion to control a direction in which laser beams are projected and enables omission of a cylindrical lens from the laser scanning unit, so that the laser scanning unit may have reduced number of elements and improved scanning efficiency.

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

There are many patents disclosing applied techniques in connection with laser beam printer (LBP). Examples
20 of such patents include US5,128,795, US5,162,938, US5,329,399, US5,710,654, US5,757,533, US5,619,362, US5,721,631, US5,553,729, US5,111,219, US5,995,131, and Japanese patent Nos. 4-50908 and 5-45580. Most of the laser beam printers disclosed in these patents
25 include a laser scanning unit (LSU) that uses a

polygonal mirror, such as a quadrigonal or a hexagonal mirror, rotating at a speed as high as, for example, 40000/min, so as to control the laser beam scanning in the laser beam printer.

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A conventional laser scanning unit 1 will now be described with reference to Figs. 1, 1A, and 1B to explain the structure and optic path in general laser scanning units. As can be seen from Fig. 1, the laser scanning unit 1 includes a semiconductor laser 10 that serves as a light source to emit laser beams, which sequentially pass through an aperture 11 and a collimator 12. The laser beams pass through the collimator 12 to form parallel beams and then pass through a cylindrical lens 13, a main function of which is to cause a width of the parallel beams in a sub-major scanning direction or Y-axis to focus in a direction parallel to a major scanning direction or X-axis and thereby form a line image, which is a point in Fig. 1B. The laser scanning unit 1 also includes a polygonal mirror 14 that is adapted to rotate at high speed, so that a plurality of reflection mirrors 15 uniformly and continuously arranged on the polygonal mirror 14 are just located at or in the vicinity of a focal point of the above-mentioned line image. The

polygonal mirror 14 serves to control a direction in which the laser beams are projected therefrom. The a plurality of continuous reflection mirrors 15 in high rotating speed are adapted to deflect and reflect laser 5 beams incident on the reflection mirrors 15 in a direction parallel to the major scanning direction or X-axis to an $f\theta$ lens 16 at uniform angular velocity. The $f\theta$ lens 16 is located at one side of the polygonal mirror 14 and may be a single-element scanning lens, 10 as shown in Fig. 1, or a two-element scanning lens, as that shown in the figures of US Patent No. 5,995,131. Laser beams incident on the $f\theta$ lens 16 via the reflection mirrors 15 on the polygonal mirror 14 are focused to form a circular light spot that is then 15 projected onto a photoreceptor drum 17 to achieve a required scanning linearity. The above-described conventional laser scanning unit has the following problems in use:

- 20 1. The rotary polygonal mirror 14 in the conventional laser scanning unit 1 is very difficult to make and requires high manufacturing cost to increase the cost of the laser scanning unit.
- 25 2. Since the conventional polygonal mirror 14 must be

able to rotate at a speed as high as, for example, 40000/min, and have high precision, the reflection mirrors 15 on the polygonal mirror 14 usually have a very small mirror width in the direction of Y-axis. Therefore, it is necessary to additionally provide a cylindrical lens 13 in the conventional laser scanning unit, so that laser beams passed through the cylindrical lens 13 are focused to form a line (or a point on Y-axis) before being projected onto the reflection mirrors 15 of the polygonal mirror 14. The conventional laser scanning unit therefore has increased number of elements and requires increased assembling operations.

15 3. The conventional polygonal mirror 14 rotate at high rotating speed, such as 40000/min, to produce relatively high noises. Moreover, a relatively long waiting period is required for the polygonal mirror 14 to reach a working rotational speed. That 20 is, a long waiting period is needed after the laser scanning unit is turned on.

25 4. According to the assembling structure of the conventional laser scanning unit, laser beams projected onto the reflection mirrors 15 of the

5 polygonal mirror 14 have a central axis that is not aligned with a central rotation axis of the polygonal mirror 14. When designing the fθ lens 16, it is necessary to consider a deviation from the axis of the polygonal mirror 14. Thus, it is more difficult to design and manufacture the fθ lens 16.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

10 It is therefore a primary object of the present invention to provide an improved laser scanning unit, in which a micro electronic mechanic system (MEMS) oscillatory mirror is adopted to replace the conventional rotary polygonal mirror, so that the
15 cylindrical lens for focusing laser beams in the direction of Y-axis is omitted from the laser scanning unit to reduce the number of elements for the laser scanning unit, and the noises produced during rotation of the polygonal mirror may be avoided, and the laser
20 scanning unit may be started for use without waiting period.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an improved laser scanning unit having a MEMS
25 oscillatory mirror that oscillates in harmonic motion

to enable bi-directional scanning. Therefore, the laser scanning unit having the same operating speed as a conventional laser scanning unit may provide a scanning speed twice as quick as the conventional laser scanning unit, which uses the polygonal mirror to enable scan only in one direction. The laser scanning unit of the present invention therefore has increased scanning frequency and improved scanning efficiency.

A further object of the present invention is to provide an improved laser scanning unit having a MEMS oscillatory mirror, so that laser beams have a central axis aligned with a mechanical center of the MEMS oscillatory mirror (that is, an oscillating center of the MEMS oscillatory mirror) to eliminate the problem of deviation of the central axis of laser beams from the central rotation axis of the polygonal mirror existed in the conventional laser scanning unit and to enable easy design and manufacture of the $f\theta$ lens.

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The structure and the technical means adopted by the present invention to achieve the above and other objects can be best understood by referring to the

following detailed description of the preferred embodiments and the accompanying drawings, wherein

Fig. 1 is a perspective conceptual diagram explaining
5 a conventional laser scanning unit;

Fig. 1A is a top view explaining an optical path defined
by the laser scanning unit of Fig. 1;

10 Fig. 1B is a side view of Fig. 1A;

Fig. 2 is a perspective conceptual view explaining a
laser scanning unit according to the present
invention;

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Fig. 2A is a top view explaining an optical path defined
by the laser scanning unit of Fig. 2;

Fig. 2B is a side view of Fig. 2A; and

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Fig. 2C is a perspective view of a MEMS oscillatory
mirror adopted in the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

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Please refer to Figs. 2, 2A, 2B, and 2C. A laser scanning unit (LSU) 2 according to the present invention mainly includes a semiconductor laser 20, a collimator 21, a micro electronic mechanic system (MEMS) oscillatory mirror 22, and an $f\theta$ lens 23. The laser scanning unit 2 is characterized in that the MEMS oscillatory mirror 22 substitutes for the rotary polygon mirror 14 in the conventional laser scanning unit 1, so that laser beams emitted from the semiconductor laser 20 pass the collimator 21 to form parallel beams, which are directly projected onto the MEMS oscillatory mirror 22 without the need of passing through a cylindrical lens first. The MEMS oscillatory mirror 22 may oscillate in a harmonic motion at a certain oscillating amplitude, so as to control a direction in which incident laser beams are reflected, and cause the laser beams to reflect onto the $f\theta$ lens 23 located at one side of the MEMS oscillatory mirror 22 to achieve a scanning linearity required by the laser scanning unit.

In the harmonic motion of the MEMS oscillatory mirror 22 of the laser scanning unit 2, there are two ways that may be employed to achieve the required scanning linearity, namely, electric modulation and optical

modulation.

First, the electrical modulation means modulation of laser input signal, so that the laser input signal is
5 synchronized with the harmonic motion of the MEMS oscillatory mirror 22.

Second, in the optical modulation, the $f\theta$ lens is changed in design. That is, a parameter of the lens
10 is changed from θ to $\sin\theta$, so that the $f\theta$ lens is changed to an $f\sin\theta$ lens to match the harmonic motion of the MEMS oscillatory mirror 22.

In accordance with the currently available electronic
15 technique or technique for forming an $f\theta$ lens, both of the above two modulation ways may be successfully implemented to achieve the required scanning linearity.

20 The inclusion of the MEMS oscillatory mirror 22 in the laser scanning unit 2 of the present invention to substitute for the conventional rotary polygon mirror
14 provides at least the following advantages:

25 1. It is no longer necessary to include a cylindrical

lens in the laser scanning unit, allowing the fθ lens to have an optical design that is more robust and has higher tolerance.

5 2. Unlike the conventional laser scanning unit 1 using the polygonal mirror 14, the laser scanning unit 2 of the present invention does not have a deviation of the central axis of laser beams from the mechanical center of the MEMS oscillatory mirror 22.

10 Thus, it is possible to consider only a symmetric optical field in designing the fθ lens 23 and thereby simplify the design and manufacture of the fθ lens 23.

15 3. Once the harmonic motion of the MEMS oscillatory mirror 22 is started, a working rotational speed thereof can be quickly reached almost without any waiting period. Moreover, the MEMS oscillatory mirror 22 may have a relatively high operating speed
20 when it is compared to the polygonal mirror 14 that is driven to rotate by an air-bearing motor. Therefore, the MEMS oscillatory mirror 22 has improved scanning amplitude efficiency.

25 4. The harmonic motion of the MEMS oscillatory mirror

22 includes flip-flop oscillations at regular
oscillating amplitude to allow bi-directional
scanning. Therefore, when the operating speed is
the same, the bi-directional scanning of the MEMS
5 oscillatory mirror 22 is twice as quick as the
one-directional scanning of the polygonal mirror 14,
enabling the laser scanning unit of the present
invention to have improved scanning efficiency.

10 The present invention has been described with a
preferred embodiment thereof and it is understood that
many changes and modifications in the described
embodiment can be carried out without departing from
the scope and the spirit of the invention that is to
15 be limited only by the appended claims.